

# FALLS AMONG OLDER ADULTS

## Did you know?

- Falls are the leading cause of injury death and disability for all Utahns ages 65 and older.
- Every year, nearly 2,700 elderly Utahns are hospitalized for a fall injury.
- Every year, an average of 75 older Utahns die from a fall-related injury.



## Utah Fall-Related Injury Data 2000–2004

### SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

#### WHO

##### Females suffer more fall-related injuries:

- 168 females died from fall-related injuries
- 9,616 were hospitalized for fall injuries
- 23,254 females were treated in emergency departments (EDs) for fall-related injuries

##### More males die from fall-related injuries

- 202 fall-related deaths among male seniors
- 3,758 hospitalizations
- 10,188 emergency department visits

##### Totals, male and female, 2000–2004

- 370 deaths
- 13,374 hospitalizations
- 33,442 emergency department visits

#### HOW

- 25,819 (77%) of ED visits were for falls due to slipping, tripping or bumping into something
- 3,239 ED visits (10%) were for falls down stairs
- 3,651 were for other falls from one level to another
- 673 (2%) were for falls from a bed or chair
- 594 (1.8%) were for falls from ladders

#### WHAT

- Falls account for as many as 87% of all fractures among seniors.
- Falls are the second leading cause of traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries in Utahns 65 and older.
- Of all fall-related fractures, hip fractures cause the most deaths.



### WHY DO SENIORS FALL?



Seniors spend most of their time at home and 1/2 to 2/3 of all falls happen in or around the house. Common hazards include:

- Poorly-lit stairs
- Lack of stair railings
- Clutter in stairwells
- No grab bars in bathrooms
- Slippery bathroom surfaces
- Unstable furniture
- Throw rugs
- Electrical cords in walkways

Physical changes that come with age also put seniors at risk:

- Failing eyesight or incorrect eyeglass prescriptions
- Muscle weakness
- Osteoporosis
- Problems with balance
- Diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's

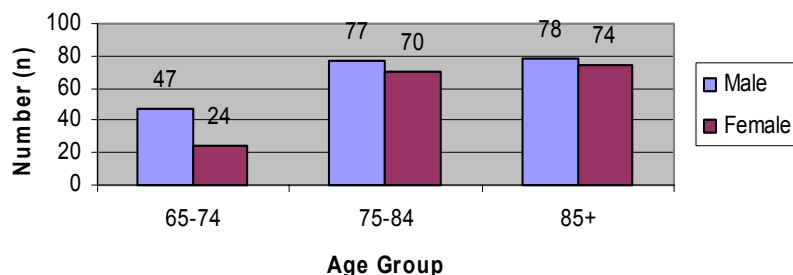
Even shoes play a major role in falling. Studies show those who wear loose slippers or socks are much more likely to be hurt in a fall at home.

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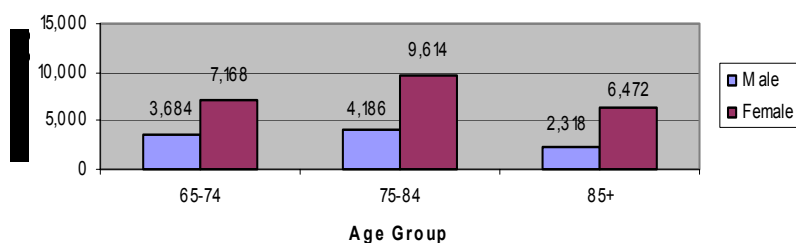
## Fall Risk by Age Group

A person's risk for falling increases with age, with most fall deaths occurring among those 85 and older.

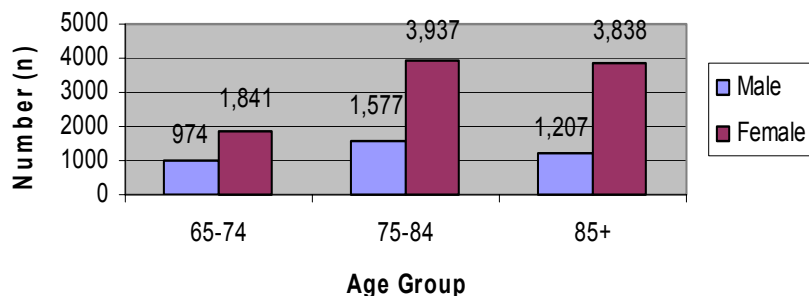
Utah Fall-Related Deaths  
2000-2004



Utah Fall-Related Emergency Dept. Visits  
2000-2004



Utah Fall-Related Hospitalizations  
2000-2004



### WHY EXERCISE?

Lack of exercise leads to muscle and bone weakness and increases the risk of falling. Exercise improves strength and well being. Many studies have shown that exercises that improve balance and coordination, like Tai Chi, are the most helpful in keeping joints, ligaments and tendons flexible.

Mild, weight-bearing exercise like walking and climbing stairs may even slow bone loss from osteoporosis.



## FALL PREVENTION TIPS

### Nutrition

- Take calcium for strong bones
- Get enough vitamin D so that your body can absorb calcium

### Health

- Get your vision checked
- Know the side effects of your medications. Talk with your doctor about ways to reduce your chances of falling by using the lowest effective dosage.



### Exercise

- Do weight-bearing and flexibility exercises

### Footwear

- Wear supportive shoes with low heels or rubber soles
- Don't wear socks without shoes

### Stairs

- Install handrails on stairs inside and outside the house
- Put bright lights in stairwells
- Keep stairs free of clutter

### Living Areas

- Keep walkways free of clutter
- Avoid throw rugs, or secure them with tape or non-slip pads
- Install nightlights
- Keep electrical and phone cords out of the way.

### In the Bathroom

- Use a shower chair
- Put strong grab bars on walls around the tub and by the toilet
- Add nonskid mats to bathtubs



### In the Kitchen

- Keep frequently used items within easy reach
- Use a sturdy step stool when you need something from a high shelf

### In Sleeping Areas

- Adjust the height of the bed so it's easy to get in and out of
- Install nightlights

\*Data are taken from the Utah Department of Health's Indicator-Based Information System for Public Health (IBIS), which compiles injury data from hospital discharge records.

